
Ellen White's Habit

Douglas Hackleman

Thomas Paine, whose body has now moldered to dust and who is to be called forth at the end of the one thousand years, at the second resurrection, to receive his reward and suffer the second death, is . . . one of the vilest and most corrupt of men, one who despised God and His law. [Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, 1854]

Thus spake Ellen G. White, self-proclaimed messenger of God and founding matriarch of the Seventh-day Adventist church, in 1854. And although her paragraph on Paine is prefaced a sentence earlier with an "I saw" (implying that her opinion of him was received in a vision), her husband James White wrote and published a similar passage in his publication the *Adventist Review and Sabbath Herald* a few months earlier (September 13, 1853, p. 74).

Both James and Ellen White were expressing an attitude common among conservative Christians, especially those who had been followers of William Miller and had anguished through Christ's failure to appear—as predicted—on October 22, 1844. Two months after the "great disappointment," seventeen-year-old Millerite Ellen Harmon of Gorham, Maine, began having visions. Harmon's first two visions (in December 1844 and February 1845) convinced a small group of grieving Millerites that what really had happened on October 22, 1844, was that probation had terminated for "all the wicked world" (James White, *A Word to the Little Flock*). As she explained the visions two years later to friend and supporter Joseph Bates, Christ had left His intercessory ministry in the holy place of the heavenly sanctuary "as Bridegroom to receive His kingdom" (the New Jerusalem) from God the Father in the most holy place. This idea was not original with Ellen Harmon White. But it was her vision-backed promotion of what was

called the "shut door" doctrine, based on the bridegroom parable of Matthew 25, that convinced quite a number of disappointed Millerites that the door of mercy had closed forever on that portentous October night in 1844.

By publishing her first two visions, Ellen Harmon began a writing career that spanned seventy years, nearly all of it under the name of Ellen G. White. She married her minister husband James White in 1846, less than a year after James had publicly rebuked in the October 11, 1845, *Day Star* two former friends he claimed had "denied their [shut door] faith, in being published for marriage."

Although Ellen White shared with Thomas Paine the urge to write and publish, there were significant differences between them—ideology aside. Unlike Thomas Paine, Ellen White claimed in a 1906 letter that what she wrote in letters, testimonies, articles, and "the many volumes of my books" were "what God has opened before me in vision—the precious rays of light shining from the throne." The next two paragraphs of the letter, or "testimony," are symptomatic of another difference between the writings of Thomas Paine and Ellen White. "What voice," she asked, "will you acknowledge as the voice of God?" And eighteen of the next twenty lines of the letter are paraphrased, without permission or credit, from two paragraphs in Daniel March's book *Night Scenes in the Bible* (1870).

"Mrs. White, from an ethical standpoint, was indeed a plagiarist," wrote William Haynor twenty years ago in an unpublished paper for his denominational history professor E. K. Vanderve. "Mrs. White did not conform to the ethical standards of her day. I believe that this fact should be faced. Whether everyone else conformed or did not conform is immaterial. The fact still remains—Mrs. White did not."

Neither student Haynor nor Professor Vanderve had any inkling in 1964 that the unacknowledged paraphrasing became, as Ellen White's son William described in a private 1928 letter to Adventist historian L. E. Froom, his mother's "habit." "Mrs. White was not a substantial borrower," wrote Haynor. He could not be blamed for his ignorance, any more than his teacher.

Nearly a generation would pass before anyone again labeled Ellen White a plagiarist, at least publicly. Long Beach Seventh-day Adventist Church pastor Walter T. Rea received nationwide media attention in the early 1980s when he demonstrated that Mrs. White's use of other (mostly nineteenth-century) authors was indeed a habit that lasted most of her seventy-year writing career. Rea and others over the past five

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years have irrefutably shown that this habit extended to all her writing formats (diaries, letters, testimonies, magazine articles, books) and infiltrated all topics she addressed. And there were few topics on which she did not expound.

For those Adventists who have charted their lives by her counsel, it might be disconcerting to learn that even when she prefaced a statement with the authoritative "I saw" or "I was shown," what she was shown might well have been a passage from a nineteenth-century devotional writer. Passages have been found that purport to quote the words of her "angel guide" or—more distressing yet—the words of Christ himself speaking to her in a vision; and the words turn out to be taken from another author. (See box.)

A Comparison of Ellen White's Vision and Daniel March's Writing

Ellen White, *Selected Messages*, vol. 1, pp. 27, 28

If you refuse to believe until every shadow of uncertainty and every possibility of doubt is removed, you will never believe. The doubt that demands perfect knowledge will never yield to faith. Faith rests upon evidence, not demonstration. The Lord requires us to obey the voice of duty, when there are other voices all around us urging us to pursue an opposite course. It requires earnest attention from us to distinguish the voice which speaks from God. We must resist and conquer inclination, and obey the voice of conscience without parleying or compromise, lest its promptings cease, and will and impulse control.

The word of the Lord comes to us all who have not resisted His Spirit by determining not to hear and obey. This voice is heard in warnings, in counsels, in reproof. It is the Lord's message of light to His people. If we wait for louder calls or better opportunities, the light may be withdrawn, and we left in darkness. . . .

Daniel March, *Night Scenes*, pp. 201, 202

We must not defer our obedience till every shadow of uncertainty and every possibility of mistake is removed. The doubt that demands perfect knowledge will never yield to faith, for faith rests upon probability, not demonstration. . . . We must obey the voice of duty when there are many other voices crying against it, and it requires earnest heed to distinguish the one which speaks for God. We must cherish the impulse of conscience in the moment when it urges us to action, lest it cease from its promptings. . . .

The word of the Lord comes to us all

and it is a message of light and of salvation. If we wait for louder calls or better opportunities, the light may be withdrawn and our path left to us in darkness.

These findings do not combine happily with Mrs. White's claim in *Selected Messages* (vol. 1) that "although I am as dependent upon the Spirit of the Lord in writing my views as I am in receiving them, yet the words I employ in describing what I have seen are my own, unless they be those spoken to me by an angel, which I always enclose in marks of quotation."

Mrs. White did place quotation marks around the state-



Ellen and James White

ments of angels who spoke to her during visions. But it is curious to discover that during one vision, published in 1851, the angel spoke to her in modern English ("you," "your"); while the angel in another vision printed in the same booklet speaks King James English ("ye," "thee"). Even more surprising is the angel who, in the same vision of June 27, 1850, addressed Ellen White as both "you" and "ye," *Early Writings*.

Ellen White's claims are in the public record and open to scrutiny and comparison with her performance. In 1906, Ellen White claimed in *Selected Messages* (vol. 1): "My commission embraces the work of a prophet, but it does not end there. It embraces much more than the minds of those who have been sowing the seeds of unbelief can comprehend." Referring in a letter to her own publications she wrote: "These books contain clear, straight, unalterable truth. . . . The instruction they contain is not of human production."

Ellen White had little patience with fence sitters where her authority and its source were concerned: "The visions are either of God or the Devil. There is no half way position to be taken in the matter," she said in a letter to Harriet Smith and J. N. Andrews. "My work for the past thirty years bears the stamp of God, or of the Devil" (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4). The same absence of equivocation applied to her opinion of Thomas Paine's writings:

Satan dictated much of his writings, and it is an easy thing for him to dictate sentiments through his angels now and make it appear that they come through Thomas Paine, who, while living, was a devoted servant of the evil one. [*Early Writings*]

Because Ellen White frequently and adamantly asserted that her "views were written independent of books or of the opinions of others" (Manuscript 7, 1867) it is reasonable to infer that she was responding in such quotes to questions raised about the sources of her inspiration.

Within two years of her first visions, Joseph Bates, who in 1863 cofounded with Ellen and James White the Seventh-day Adventist denomination, had inquired by letter (July 13, 1847) whether Ellen "had light" on certain interpretations of Scripture related to the shut door before she saw it in a vision. Bates was curious because another post-disappointment Millerite, Joseph Turner, had published two different papers (in December 1844 and January 1845) attempting by reinterpretations of Scripture

to explain the failure of Christ to appear on October 22, 1844, in *The Advent Mirror*. Similar reinterpretations in Ellen (then) Harmon's first two visions, on December 1844 and February 1845, too closely paralleled Turner's efforts to go unnoticed. Beyond that, Turner was a family friend of the Harmons; Ellen admitted to Bates that one of Turner's papers "was in the house." But she denied having "read a word in it." Why? "I took no interest in reading, for it injured my head and made me nervous." Later in this letter of explanation to Bates (July 13, 1847), Ellen claimed that she "did not hear a lecture or a

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word in any way relating" to those most relevant doctrinal points regarding their recent disappointment.

A decade later, another Seventh-day Adventist pioneer, J. N. Andrews, encountered a similar coincidence. Andrews thought that he recognized the influence of John Milton's epic poem about the origin of sin and mankind's fall, *Paradise Lost*, in White's "great controversy" vision of March 1858. Andrews approached her after a weekend meeting in Battle Creek, Michigan, at which she publicly described the panoramic vision. Arthur White, Ellen's grandson, tells the story:

He told her some of the things she had said were much like a book he had read. Then he asked if she had read *Paradise Lost*. She replied in the negative. He told her that he thought she would be interested in reading it.

Ellen White forgot about the conversation, but a few days later Elder Andrews came to the home with a copy of *Paradise Lost* and offered it to her. She took the book, hardly knowing just what to do with it. She did not open it, but took it to the kitchen and put it up on a high shelf, determined that if there was anything in that book like what God had shown her in vision, she would not read it until after she had written out what the Lord had revealed to her. [*The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 4]

Ninety-nine years later, Ruth Burgeson submitted as her master's thesis for Pacific Union College a seventy-five-page study comparing Ellen White's and John Milton's descriptions of the Fall. Burgeson wrote that "one is impressed by the similarity of factual content. . . . In fact, the writer of this thesis found no disagreement between the two authors. . . ." "Of unusual significance" to Burgeson was "the correlation found in a number of instances where both authors depict with some detail an experience which is not found in the Bible." After listing seven examples of this "correlation," Burgeson pondered the question: "Why are these two authors, living two hundred years apart, so much in agreement on major fact?" Burgeson's tentative conclusion was diplomatic:

An attractive and undemonstrable conclusion . . . is that both of these serious authors seeking to justify the ways of God to men were guided by the very Holy Spirit whose aid they

invoked.

The possibilities do not end there. Regardless of what she did with it—Arthur White says that according to his father, William, his mother did subsequently read Milton—Mrs. White did receive *Paradise Lost* in the spring of 1858 and published her first and smallest volume of *The Great Controversy* in September of the same year.

At least as interesting as the Milton connection is Ellen White's literary relationship to H. L. Hastings, a First-day Adventist. During the time that Hastings and the Whites lived in Rochester, New York, James White published a three-part article by Hastings in the *Review and Herald*, beginning December 19, 1854. Most interesting, however, is the fact that although Ellen White had her Lovett's Grove, Ohio, "great controversy" vision on March 14, 1858, four days later (March 18, 1858) James White published in the *Review and Herald* what former White Estate associate secretary Ronald D. Graybill considered "a glowing review of Hastings' volume" *The Great Controversy Between God and Man, Its Origin, Progress, and End*.

Whether Ellen had read Hastings's *Great Controversy* cannot be proven; however, it may be assumed that James read it before reviewing it. Six months later Ellen White published her own *Great Controversy Between Christ and His Angels, and Satan and His Angels*. Hastings's and White's books are both brief (about 150 pages each) and, according to Adventist historian Donald R. McAdams, "remarkably similar." Wrote McAdams in 1974 (*Ellen G. White and the Protestant Historians*): "The two volumes have the same title, the same theme, the same beginning and ending, and in fact interpret Scripture almost identically." Graybill believes that "John Milton's epics stand somewhere in the background of both" books (*The Power of Prophecy*).

Whether or not she was motivated by her own lifelong health problems, Ellen White became a health reformer and wrote extensively about the benefits—even the Christian duty—of temperate living. As with other topics, there were her claims and denials. In 1897 she wrote, in *Counsels on Diet and Foods*:

I have had great light from the Lord upon the subject of health reform. I did not seek this light; I did not study to obtain it; it was given to me by the Lord to give to others.

In her husband's *Adventist Review and Sabbath Herald* of October 8, 1867 ("Questions and Answers," p. 260), Mrs. White explained that it was on "June 6, 1863, that the great subject of Health Reform was opened before me in vision." The date of the article is important, for it was four years after the vision:

As I introduced the subject of health to friends . . . and spoke against drugs and flesh meats, and in favor of water, pure air, and a proper diet, the reply was often made, "You speak very nearly the opinions taught in the *Laws of Life*, and other publications, by Drs. Trall, Jackson, and others. Have you read that paper and those works?" My reply was that I had not, neither should I read them till I had fully written out my own views, lest it should be said that I had received my light upon

the subject of health from physicians, and not from the Lord.

In another written statement White answered similar queries by stating, "I had never seen a paper treating upon health" before the June 1863 vision. She added, "After the vision was given me my husband was aroused upon the health question" (Manuscript 7, 1867).

These 1867 denials by Ellen White are difficult to accept when it is realized that James White published several health-related articles in his church paper during the six months preceding Ellen's June 1863 health vision. Medical historian Ronald L. Numbers has described James White's own public stress on healthful living that began five months before the vision. In the February 10, 1863 *Review* "he called air, water, and light 'God's great remedies,' preferable to 'doctors and their drugs.'" The next week's *Review* carried a front-page article by Dr. James Caleb Jackson titled "Diphtheria, Its Causes, Treatment and Cure." According to Numbers, this was shortly after Mrs. White had successfully applied Jackson's treatment to her sons during their bouts with diphtheria. Numbers wrote: "The Jackson article . . . spelled out the basic principles of health reform in tips on eating properly, dressing sensibly, and breathing lots of fresh air. . . . During the month of May [1863], James White continued to focus on hygienic living in the *Review* and *Herald* with a note from Dio Lewis on dress reform and two extracts from Hall's *Journal of Health*, one urging a meatless, low-fat diet during spring and summer, the other recommending two meals a day." Yet Ellen White could write in 1867 (Manuscript 7), "I had never seen a paper treating upon health. After the vision was given me my husband was aroused upon the health question."

James White, who served as his wife's editor most of the time until his death in 1881, also made claims and denials. In his autobiographical *Life Incidents* (published by Steam Press, Battle Creek, Michigan, in 1888), he argued that Ellen's writings contained "many things . . . which cannot be found in other books" (p. 328). In his next sentence James provides as an example "her favorite theme, God in Nature." But Mrs. White's best-known passage on God in nature is a close paraphrase of

an apologetic digression against naturalism from a sermon by nineteenth-century Anglican clergyman Henry Melvill. (See box.)

"God in Nature" Borrowed from Henry Melvill

Henry Melvill: If our creed were to common forms of speech, it might be concluded that we regarded nature as some agent quite distinct from deity, having its own sphere, and its own powers, in and with which to work. We are wont to draw a line between what we call natural, and what supernatural; assigning the latter to an infinite power, but ascribing the former to ordinary causes unconnected with the immediate interference of God. . . . We thus give energy to matter, and make a deity of nature? . . . to say that matter was . . . placed in certain relations, and then left to obey the laws . . . that matter was endued with certain properties, . . . and perform the revolutions originally impressed and commanded. This is . . . unscientific as it is unscriptural to contend. Henry Melvill, *Sermons*, pp. 295, 296.

Ellen G. White: *Many express themselves in a manner which would convey the idea that nature is distinct from the God of nature, having in and of itself its own limits and its own powers wherewith to work. There is with many a marked distinction between natural and supernatural. The natural is ascribed to ordinary causes, unconnected with the interference of God. Vital power is attributed to matter, and nature is made a deity. Matter is supposed to be placed in certain relations, and left to act from fixed laws, with which God himself cannot interfere; that nature is endowed with certain properties and then left to itself to obey these laws, and perform the work originally commanded. This is false science; there is nothing in the Word of God to sustain it.* Ellen G. White, *Testimonies* vol. 7, pp. 259-261.

James White dug a deeper hole for himself and Ellen in his next paragraph:

If commentators and theological writers generally had seen these gems of thought . . . and had they been brought out in



print, all the ministers in the land could have read them. These men gather thoughts from books, and as Mrs. W. has written and spoken a hundred things, as truthful as they are beautiful and harmonious, which cannot be found in the writings of others, they are new to the most intelligent readers and hearers. . . . She could not have learned them from books, from the fact that they do not contain such thoughts. [p. 328, 329]

The discovery in recent years by a variety of Adventist researchers that Ellen White and her editorial assistants wove the writings of scores of authors into testimonies, articles, and books published over her byline calls into question the integrity of both Ellen and James White. The White Estate recently made available for purchase on request a document comparing eighty-five pages of parallel passages between Mrs. White and Henry Melville, alone.

From the time of her first vision in 1844 until her death in 1915, the image grew that Ellen White was often shown in vision the private sins of individual church members. To these stumbling ones she would write testimonies of condemnation, reproof, correction, and/or encouragement—depending on her perception of the testimony recipient's need. But throughout her life there were periodically those who, by association with her and personal knowledge of individuals to whom she had sent testimonies, came to doubt or disbelieve the source Ellen White claimed for her information. This is known because a few of these doubters felt constrained to publish the reasons for their disenchantment.

Not one in a thousand Adventists will recognize such names as Isaac Welcome, Gilbert Cranmer, B. F. Snook, W. H. Brinkerhoff, Miles Grant, Lucinda Burdick, and H. E. Carver. Carver published a book about Ellen White in 1870 (*Mrs. E. G. White's Claim to Divine Inspiration Examined*) describing, among other stumbling blocks to his faith, "two instances in which she claimed to see in vision things that I had communicated to her myself." These instances, Carver explained, were "not calculated to strengthen my confidence in the visions." Nevertheless, throughout the last half of the nineteenth century, the larger-than-life image of Ellen White grew. The Adventist community was self-purging. Those like Carver and, best known to Adventists, D. M. Canright, who became disenchanted through direct experience with Mrs. White, usually left the church. Only a handful paused in an effort to illustrate reality's rough edges to others. Fewer still set up perimeters of their own from which to launch ineffective mortar strikes.

The attacks of embittered ex-Adventists often had the paradoxical effect of strengthening the belief of the faithful in Ellen White's inspiration. When they heard from or about her critics, they would knowingly quote Mrs. White:

Soon every possible effort will be made to discount and pervert the testimonies of God's Spirit. We must have in readiness the clear, straight messages that since 1846 have been coming to God's people. [*Selected Messages*, vol. 1]

It matters little that her warning was related to challenges to her authority contemporary with the statement. When Adventist scholars raise probing questions, backed by careful

research sixty to seventy years after her death, White's staunchest followers see the quote as a prophecy regarding those Adventist academics trained in liberal, non-Christian institutions of higher learning and infected, presumably, with the presuppositions of secular humanism. Since these same "dangerous" professors teach in Seventh-day Adventist colleges, "Adventist higher education" has come to be considered—by those who would not even recognize the term—an exorcism. (To be liberally educated is necessarily not to really be an Adventist, and vice versa.) Several North American Adventist colleges and, by turns, the two universities have suffered deeply because of this immaturity on the part of vocal and/or wealthy constituents.

Corporately, Adventism has been very shy about introspection, especially where Ellen White is concerned. In 1919, the church had a wonderful opportunity to mature. At a time when the church's administrative leaders included some of its best-educated minds, the denomination's religion and history teachers met with the administrators for several days of candid conversation. Included were discussions of Ellen White's source usage, her errors, and possible myths that had grown up around her. This representative group of knowledgeable Adventists largely agreed that the laity needed educating; but, due to fear of reactionary Ellen White supporters, nothing was ever written publicly about the significant issues pondered so openly among scholars and leaders. Sixty years later (May 1979), stenographic transcript excerpts from the long-forgotten 1919 Religion and History Teachers Conference, located in the church's archives, were published without permission by a marginally tolerated Adventist quarterly journal called *Spectrum*.

It was during the 1970s that Adventist scholars focused their expertise on White's three main visions: the shut door, the great controversy, and health reform. Their findings spoke volumes about Ellen White's claims and denials. The reaction to their findings by church leaders said at least as much about "free inquiry" within Seventh-day Adventism: It is expensive.

In 1978, Ingemar Linden, a Swedish Seventh-day Adventist and former Adventist Junior College and Seminary Bible and homiletics teacher published a book titled *The Last Trump*. It was a spin-off from his 1971 doctoral dissertation. While doing his research, Linden had elicited the pique of Ellen White's grandson, Arthur White, who was then director of the Ellen G. White Estate and a member of its board. Linden claimed in his book that Ellen White had taught the long-abandoned shut door doctrine based on her early (and later edited) visions. Worse, from Arthur White's perspective, Linden had buttressed his case by quoting from previously unreleased portions of a letter Ellen White had written to her friend Joseph Bates on July 13, 1847. In this letter she explained to Bates just how her first two visions had convinced some disappointed Millerites of the shut door, and that they had no duty after October 22, 1844 to rescue souls from damnation.

Arthur White did not want Linden to make available the embarrassing evidence. But once Linden had read the long-suppressed letter fragments, White could not deter him. Linden's book did not receive wide circulation because the Adventist book distribution system would not carry it. But through

Linden's work, and probably even more through White's attempts to refute it, Adventist scholars and other students of Adventist roots became aware that church histories on Ellen White and the pioneers' seven-year relationship to the shut door had not only been wrong but, in some cases, perhaps intentionally so.

Linden's *Last Trump* was actually the third in a series of scholarly notes on Ellen White produced during the seventies. By 1974, then Andrews University associate professor of history Donald R. McAdams had scrutinized portions of Ellen White's third (1889) expansion of her book *Great Controversy*. His conclusions, published in *Ellen G. White and the Protestant Historians*, were disturbing:

What we find when we examine the historical portions of the *Great Controversy* (those events from the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. through the French Revolution) is that entire chapters at a time are simply selective abridgments of Protestant historians. . . . In the samples I have examined there is not one historical fact in her text that is not in their text. [pp. 16, 17]

It was no longer simply a question of whether Ellen White had read John Milton's *Paradise Lost* before or after her 1858 great controversy vision. McAdams's 244-page comparison study was motivated by his desire to be able to respond defini-

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tively to his students when they asked "why the history in their assigned reading does not agree with the history they have read in *Great Controversy*."

In March 1974 McAdams sent Arthur White a copy of his completed study paralleling Mrs. White's handwritten draft of the *Great Controversy* half-chapter on Huss with her published version and James Wylie's nineteenth-century work on the same topic. The concerns McAdams expressed in his cover letter to White on March 29, 1974, turned out to be prophetic:

As you will know [Ellen White's work] is a dangerous area for Adventists to study. This I consider to be a great tragedy. . . . It is a bit discouraging to spend so much time on a project which . . . is likely to be buried in a file drawer somewhere. . . . I did this study because I wanted to get the truth. . . . My hope is that it will actually change somebody's mind. The mind I would most like to change is yours. . . . It would be very frustrating to me after all this work for the [White Estate] trustees to read this, acknowledge that what I say is in the main true, and then simply bury it because "the Church is not ready for this yet."

After nearly four years of foot-dragging, McAdams was allowed to share ten of Ellen White's sixty-four manuscript

pages on the life of Huss and his analysis of it with a limited audience of fellow Adventist historians.

While McAdams's request was being ignored, the White Estate—especially Arthur White—had its hands full with the research requests of another young Adventist scholar, Loma Linda University history of medicine professor Ronald Numbers. While looking for material that would add interest to his classes, Numbers had perused a copy of L. B. Coles's *Philosophy of Health*, which had once belonged to Dr. John Harvey Kellogg. Numbers was intrigued by shorthand notes and page numbers, in the famous physician's own hand, scattered among the margins of the book. From "a volume by volume search" among Mrs. White's writings on health, Numbers learned "what Dr. Kellogg had discovered three-quarters of a century before: a strikingly close similarity between Dr. Coles's language and Mrs. White's. This serendipitous discovery spared Numbers "to undertake a thorough examination of Ellen White's development as a health reformer."

In Arthur White's nepotistic eyes, Numbers's research was an enormous threat. His findings were slated for a book about White's grandmother. Numbers planned to submit his manuscript to a secular publishing house; White wanted him to publish through the church. Numbers was writing as a historian; White wanted him to write as a man of faith. Numbers was demonstrating Mrs. White's reliance on nineteenth-century health reformers, and he was asking the White Estate to release various unpublished Ellen White letters.

Numbers was successful in obtaining manuscript releases for most of the Ellen White letter fragments he requested, but there were several that Arthur White and the trustees refused to release. One example was an 1873 letter in which Mrs. White "describes a vacation trip to the Rocky Mountains in which she and the members of her family dined on wild duck." The quote was embarrassing because White had written so strongly against meat-eating two years earlier (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2): "Those who digress occasionally to gratify the taste in eating a fattened turkey or other flesh meats, pervert their appetites. . . . The lack of stability in regard to the principles of health reform is a true index of their character and their spiritual strength."

When *Prophecy of Health* was published by Random House in 1976, it ended Ronald Numbers's work for the church. And yet four years later McAdams, by then a college president, could safely write in *Spectrum* (March 1980) that "Numbers' small volume, thoroughly researched and clearly written, was a first-class piece of historical scholarship and recognized as such in professional journals."

The derivative nature of Mrs. White's writings was forced into the open at the end of the seventies by Adventist pastor Walter Rea, who effectively threw himself beneath the wheels of the juggernaut by insisting that White's ubiquitous and unacknowledged source usage must be shared with the Adventist laity.

At Rea's request, General Conference president Neal Wilson picked eighteen scholars from around the country to spend two days examining Rea's extensive examples of Ellen White's "borrowings." When the General Conference leaders

rejected the panel's recommendation that "an in-depth study on the writing of *Desire of Ages*" (White's volume on the life of Christ) be undertaken by Rea and "a person trained in scholarly methodology with whom Rea would be pleased to work." Rea applied himself seriously to the writing of his own provocatively titled book *The White Lie*. Rea dedicated his work, published in 1982 (M & R Publications, Turlock, California), "to all those who would rather believe a bitter truth than a sweet lie."

Meanwhile the White Estate, now under the direction of Dr. Robert Olson, was deciding, internally, to borrow a scholar of its own choosing from the Adventist theological seminary at Andrews University to discover the extent of Mrs. White's source dependence in *Desire of Ages*. Arthur White, who still maintained an office as well as his board position at the Estate, was deeply troubled by the plan and presented thirteen written concerns to the board. One of his primary fears was of source critical studies: "Are the [Andrews University] scholars trained in methods of research by universities known to have demolished faith in the Bible . . . capable of passing proper judgment in areas where absolute honesty in the acceptance of records and faith based on evidence are important factors?" White concluded by decrying the earlier scholarly efforts of Linden, Numbers, and McAdams.

Walter Rea, of course, was removed from the ministry of the Adventist church in 1981. Popular Adventist theologian Desmond Ford was also relieved of his college professorship and ministerial credentials within a year of a 1979 presentation, made to the Pacific Union College chapter of the Association of Adventist Forums, titled "The Investigative Judgment: Theological Milestone or Historical Necessity?"

Ford, while expressing faith in Mrs. White's prophetic ministry, insisted that the church's doctrine of the "investigative judgment" was not based on sound biblical exegesis. The investigative judgment was what the Adventist pioneers used to replace the shut door. The investigative judgment was a more sophisticated apologetic for Christ's nonappearance in 1844, and continues to find a place in the Adventist statement of fundamental beliefs. Ford, and a less vocal majority of Adventist theologians, wanted to bring it into harmony with the Bible. But the old guard, touting Ellen White as an inspired interpreter of Scripture, had the political horses, according to Raymond F. Cottrell in "The Sanitary Review Committee and its New Consensus" (November 1980 *Spectrum*). Scores of Adventist pastors in North America and Australia have subsequently lost their positions because they were sympathetic to Ford's desire to be explicitly faithful to Scripture.

What makes honest inquiry so continually expensive in the Seventh-day Adventist church is the unthoughtful acceptance of Ellen White's extravagant claims. It is not possible to work in the Adventist ministry while promoting a revised image of Ellen White and her work, or to call for doctrinal adjustments that are inconsistent with her scriptural interpretations. And it is no help, as Ford discovered, to show that Mrs. White sometimes gave the same pivotal Bible texts different interpretations at different times.

Church leaders, to a person, agree that Ellen White made mistakes; but they don't want any examples. White Estate asso-

ciate secretary Ronald Graybill provided too many illustrations of the humanity of Mrs. White in his doctoral dissertation accepted by a Johns Hopkins University History Department committee in 1983, according to a review in the October 1983 *Adventist Careers*. Within months the Board of Trustees voted him out of the White Estate. Linden, Numbers, Rea, Ford, Graybill, and others were axed for the mistake of talking in front of the children. Church leaders understand that their research does not just demonstrate the possibility that a prophet might prevaricate—they knew that from the Old Testament. Their findings suggest the possibility that the supernatural is not required to explain what so many have been led to believe was entirely miraculous.

Arthur White's fears are understandable. He has spent a lifetime teaching fellow Adventists that "Mrs. White ever sought to avoid being influenced by others" (*The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 4). Either he has known the facts and been dishonest, or he has not known the facts and spoken presumptuously.

Rather than an attack by a disgruntled Adventist, this is a plea by a loyal member who prays that those who have participated in the long-standing coverup will soon, with the help of the Spirit, disown their struthious apologetics. Because it is true of Seventh-day Adventism what Paul Johnson (*A History of Christianity*, 1977) wrote about Christianity in general:

Christianity, by identifying truth with faith, must teach . . . that any interference with the truth is immoral. A Christian . . . historian who draws the line limiting the field of enquiry at any point whatsoever, is admitting the limits of his faith.

Adventists and interested bystanders are left to ponder the curious correlation between the personal ethics of Ellen White and the harm they caused those who questioned them, and the good things that her life and work motivated her followers to accomplish:

1. Ellen White and her fellow Adventist pioneers consistently rejected the doctrine of eternal burning torment for the lost.
2. Her promotion of healthful living as religious duty has left Seventh-day Adventist males with a 6.2-year longer life expectancy than the general population—Adventist women with a 3.1-year advantage.
3. Mrs. White's belief that the medical work was the "right arm" (*Saturday Evening Post*, March 1984) of the Adventist message led to the opening of 345 hospitals, sanitariums, and clinics around the globe.

These and more must be weighed against the blood of the scholars and the pain of disillusionment faced by others whose eyes have been opened. No doubt the good could not have happened without her reifying claims—a fact that only reinforces Aldous Huxley's recognition that somehow humanity does better when it believes in God.

Thanks to the courage of Adventist scholars, today their brethren may have the unvarnished truth as well as the benefits. And it is nice to know that Thomas Paine may not have taken dictation from Satan after all. •